



Reconciling difference and building trust:

International Collaboration in Indigenous Language Revitalization



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International Collaboration in Indigenous Language Revitalization



This presentation sets out to:

- Share our experience working collaboratively within the Aboriginal and academic communities, exploring issues that confront the diverse participant constituencies.
- Share strategies used to address the issues of difference that frequently interface with language revitalization initiatives.
- Discuss measures of successful collaboration along with residual challenges.

The *InField* Institute



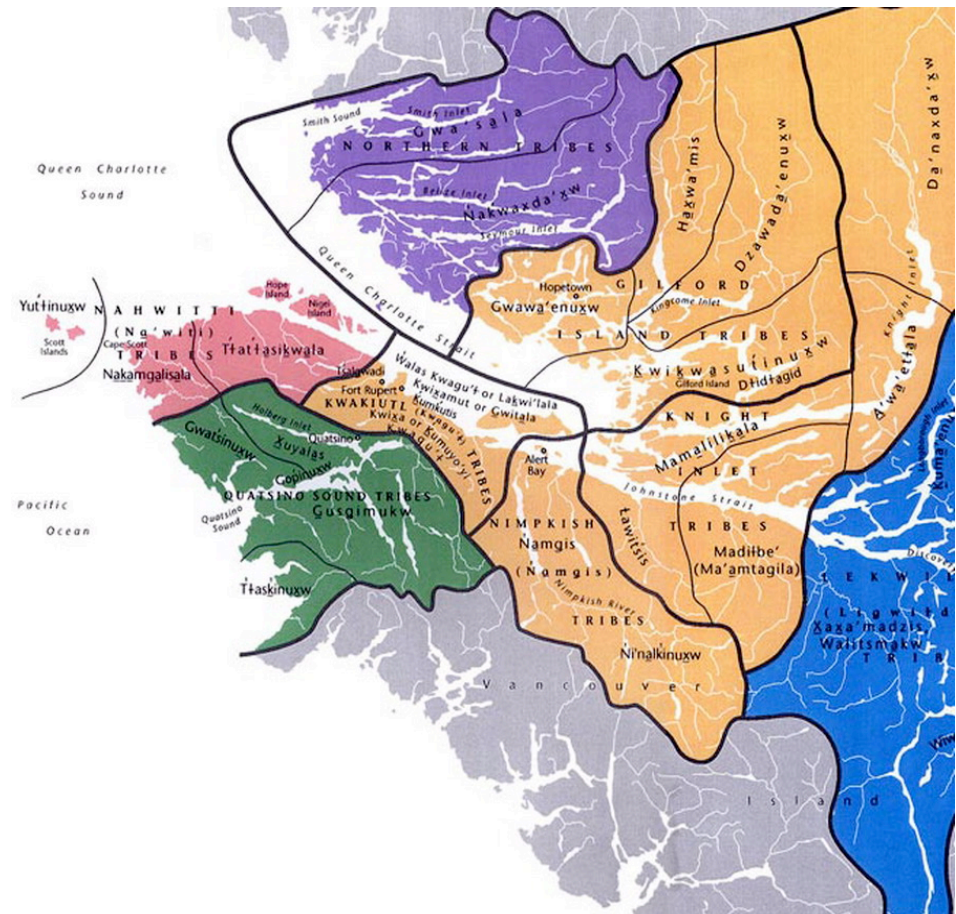
- In the summer of 2008, the University of California, Santa Barbara, with the support of various funding bodies, hosted a six-week *InField* Institute:
 - Two weeks of concentrated, instructional workshops
 - Four weeks of applying these skills in intensive field linguistics methods and community-grounded ethical protocols.
- Participants in the latter section were assigned to work with speakers representing one of three endangered languages: $k^w ak^w ala$, Ekegusi, and Mende.

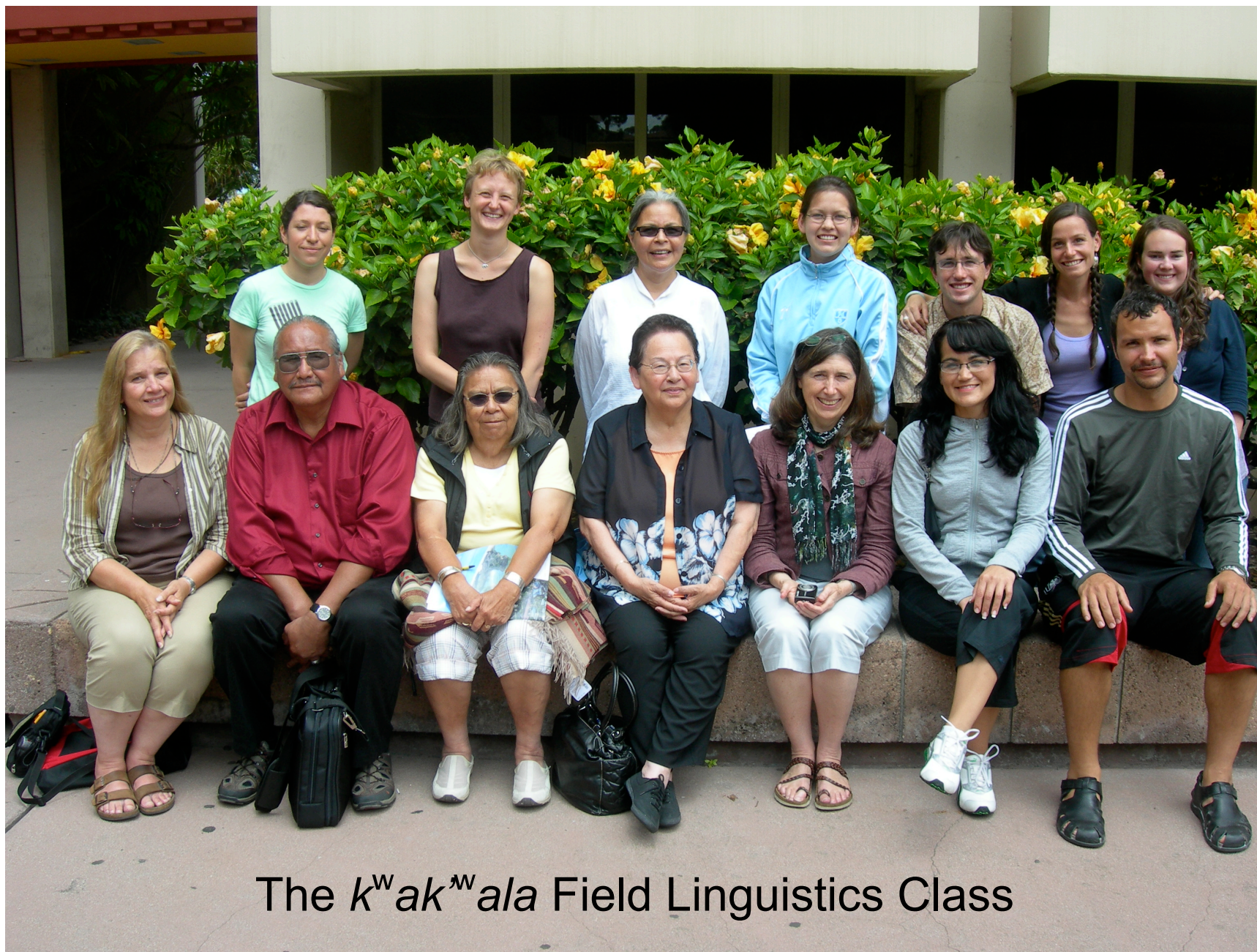
InField: k^wak^wala



- In 2005, 161 fluent speakers were identified, out of the total *k^wak^wəkə'wak^w* population (approx. 7500). The number of speakers has since diminished dramatically.
- The *k^wak^wala* collaboration was sponsored by a SSHRC Strategic Aboriginal Research project.

k^wak^wəkə'wak^w Territory





The *k^wak^wala* Field Linguistics Class

InField: k^wak^wala



- Participating in the *k^wak^wala* course were:
 - 2 Elders
 - 1 Linguist
 - 4 *k^wak^wəkə'wak^w* Community Members representing a wide range of educational backgrounds
 - 1 Cheyenne Elder/Fluent Speaker
 - 1 Anthropologist/Language Activist
 - 3 PhD Students: Austria, Canada, USA
 - 2 MA Student: Canada, USA
 - 3 short-term visiting scholars: Canada, Japan, USA
- In the course of our work, three phases emerged:
 - *Negotiating Difference*
 - *Building Trust, Reconciling Difference*
 - *Collaboration*

1. Negotiating Differen



- We were bound by a shared commitment to the revitalization of *k^wak^wala*, yet challenged by the dimensions of difference among us.

Aboriginal vs Academic

- We consider this a false dichotomy, as it implies incompatibility , conflict, or over-simplification. We view our differences as dynamic and complex, as multi-layered and multi-faceted as our individual identities.

Differences...



academic background
ethno-cultural background
talents and expertise
institutional expectations
intra-/inter-community relationships
experience with or ignorance of historical/appropriation issues
responsibilities
short- and long-term goals
intellectual property rights
motivations
priorities
resources/backing (legitimacy)
entitlement
protocols

2. Building Trust, Reconciling Difference



- a) Segregate the endeavour.
- b) Maintain open, respectful, and constructive communication.
- c) Determine a communal purpose.
- d) Create a knowledge collective.

2. Building Trust, Reconciling Difference



- a) Segregate the endeavour: *New-tral* spaces, neutral faces
- Establishing physical and emotional distance from the context of intra-/inter-community conflict/alliances/rivalries can have a defusing effect, making for more inclusive, non-partisan surroundings, which boosts participation.
 - Sharing in the discovery of a new place, developing ‘survival’ strategies.
 - Negotiating new relationships and re-negotiating old relationships within our new community.
 - A sequestered environment reduces the degree of distraction: eat, sleep, breathe *k^wak^wala*, if only for awhile.

2. Building Trust, Reconciling Difference



- b) Maintain open, respectful, and constructive communication.
- Identify a code of conduct founded upon respect.
 - Presence of Elders summons specific protocols and codes of conduct. Out of deference to the Elders in our group, we maintained an atmosphere of harmony and dedication.
- Share concerns and grievances, discussing towards a resolution rather than over-emphasizing a problem.
- Address barriers as they arise so as not to let them govern the engagement or impede the workflow.

2. Building Trust, Reconciling Differences



c) Determine a communal purpose.

- Sharing individual purposes, and finding the common thread that binds them.
 - We were brought together by a shared dedication to the revitalization of *k^wak^wala*.
- Focusing on educating towards achievement of the purpose rather than blaming: “I have something to learn here.”
- Provides a foundation upon which new relationships are built and old relationships are rebuilt rather than perpetuating pre-existing differences.
- Once a purpose has been established, trust lies in allowing others to make choices about their learning. There are no guarantees...

2. Building Trust, Reconciling Difference



d) Build a knowledge collective

- Start at square one then accelerate quickly in learning linguistic content and cultural content. Every participant contributes their strongest features creating a resilient body of knowing.
- Support the knowledge-building momentum: Continue to bring forth that which is questioned, unknown, or not understood.
- Relinquish control: Allow the group to grow as a collective, developing processes and outcomes in its own right, creating an atmosphere founded upon the strengths and qualities inherent. Facilitators guide this progression without overriding it.

3. Collaboration



- Decolonizing effect
 - Building of trust
 - Building of relationships
 - Rebuilding of the *k^wak^wala* speech community

Challenges



- Preparatory pragmatics: birth certificates, passports, visas, housing, transportation, childcare, taxes...
- Balancing the needs of the group with the needs of the individual
- Ethics and protocols
- Future Work: Analysis, Archiving, Access

Where do we go from here?



- Thesis projects
- Co-authorship
- Facebook, email contact
- Future collaboration
- Reunion?